



# The Moral Outlooks of Cultural Workers in Pandemic Times

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## Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has radically changed the working conditions of cultural workers, especially for those whose work involves physical attendance. At the same time, several cultural policy measures have been implemented to help the cultural sector during the pandemic. The purpose of this article is to analyze cultural workers' responses to the pandemic working situation and to corona-specific cultural policies. To this end, a moral economy perspective is applied. Moral economy is a perspective that views economic activities, in the broad sense, through a moral and not just a material lens. It has to do with how moral sentiments and norms govern what is seen as acceptable or unacceptable economic behavior in different spheres of activity. The vast bulk of research on cultural workers has mainly emphasized the symbolic and material dimensions of their motivations. However, recently there has also been a growing interest in the moral motivations of cultural workers. The analysis is based on two different empirical materials. First, it draws on 57 interviews with professional musicians in Norway. All the interviews were carried out during the pandemic, more specifically between August 2020 and February 2021. Second, the analysis focuses on one of the most heightened public debates that arose as a response to corona cultural policy (i.e., the implementation of

a stimulation scheme for the cultural sector). The article concludes that the pandemic has revealed the presence of two conflicting moral outlooks in the understanding of cultural workers and cultural policy.

#### Keywords

Covid-19 pandemic, moral economies, cultural workers, musicians

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has radically altered the working conditions of the cultural sector in general and of cultural workers in particular. Overnight, many cultural workers were thrown into a situation of economic insecurity and hardship, which has lasted for years. Concert venues, galleries, and theatre stages have been shut down for long periods, and many cultural workers have lost their jobs or been laid off. At the same time, several public measures have been implemented to help the cultural sector endure the pandemic. Some are universal social policies or aid packages directed at the entire private enterprise sector to compensate for its losses during the pandemic, while other measures are specific to the cultural sector.

This article investigates cultural workers' responses to the pandemic working situation and to corona-specific policies. Crises, upheavals, and other dramatic social events offer interesting opportunities for research as they can bring constitutive features of social and political structures that may normally go unnoticed to the fore. As Turner (1980) notes, these are moments where actors are compelled to declare their true political interests and allegiances and where values that govern social and political life are brought to the surface in articulate forms.

Research on cultural workers has predominately emphasized the symbolic and material dimensions of their motivations. However, recently there has also been a growing interest in the moral motivations of cultural workers (Banks 2006; Mangset & Røyseng 2009; Umney 2017). This article contributes to this literature by analyzing cultural workers' responses to the pandemic working situation and policies through the lens of the moral economy perspective (Sayer 2000; Thompson 1971). It explores how a moral economy perspective can complement and enrich the existing emphasis on the symbolic and economic dimensions of cultural work.

The analysis is based on two different empirical materials. First, it draws on 57 interviews with professional musicians in Norway. All the interviews were carried out during the pandemic, more specifically between August 2020 and February 2021. Second, the analysis focuses on one of the most heightened public debates that arose as a response to corona cultural policy (i.e., the implementation of a stimulation scheme for the cultural sector).

We start with a short review of what research reveals about how the pandemic has affected the cultural sector and the conditions of cultural workers. Next, we discuss the stories that have dominated the research on cultural workers. Subsequently, we introduce the moral economy perspective. We then move on to an account of the methods applied in analyzing the moral outlooks of cultural workers in pandemic times before presenting the results of our analysis. Finally, we discuss the implications of our study and argue for enhancing interest in the moral aspects of cultural work and cultural policy.

## The cultural sector and the Nordic cultural model in pandemic times

During the Covid-19 pandemic, infection control orders issued by public authorities have narrowed down cultural actors' room for maneuver. Various calculations have been perfor-

med in order to document how this situation has affected the cultural sector in economic terms. In Norway, as well as internationally, such calculations support the conclusion that the creative industries, together with the tourism industry, have probably been the most heavily affected, experiencing considerable losses of income (Berge et al. 2021; Grünfeld et al. 2020; Kern 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2020). However, these calculations also show variations in the degree to which art forms and cultural activities are affected. Unsurprisingly, activities that require physical attendance have been the most affected. Activities related to the performing arts – music, theatre, dance, and opera – and physical exhibitions have been hardest hit.

During the early phase of the pandemic, however, Norwegian public authorities were quick to launch several policy measures to compensate and counteract its negative effects. While some of the measures are general, with the aim of supporting a broad range of target groups, others have been specifically directed at the cultural sector. Studies of corona-specific cultural policies in several countries indicate that such measures build on the structures of existing cultural policies (Berge et al. 2021; Betzler et al. 2021; Dümcke 2021; Lee et al. 2021; Serafini & Novosel 2021). In the Norwegian context, this means that the measures implemented seem to build on the Nordic cultural model with its welfare-oriented characteristics (Berge et al. 2021).

Several features have been highlighted as being typical of Norwegian, as well as Nordic, cultural policy. Among the characteristics specified by Mangset et al. (2008), most of them are related to the welfare state model: public authorities assume substantial responsibility for cultural life and provide relatively high levels of public support, elaborate support systems for individual artists are in place, there are strong corporatist links between interest organizations and public authorities, and typically, a relatively egalitarian cultural life exists. Despite the many nuances contained within this picture, it makes sense to emphasize the welfare aspect as an important feature of Norwegian cultural policy. However, it should be added that, since the 1990s, there have been discussions on whether Nordic welfare states have become more market-oriented (Storbjörk et al. 2021). An extensive body of literature also underscores that cultural policy has become more instrumental during the same period, both in Norway and other countries (Gray 2007; Hadley & Gray 2017; Mangset & Hylland 2017).

While preliminary analyses of corona cultural policies conclude that the Nordic model has absorbed the corona crisis quite successfully, it has also been highlighted that cultural workers outside of the larger cultural institutions and organizations have not been sufficiently covered by the schemes. In particular, it has been underscored that small and self-employed actors have experienced a weaker safety net than the bigger actors in the field (Berge et al. 2021). However, the unstable and insecure working conditions of individual artists, freelancers, and self-employed cultural workers are not new. To some extent, it is fair to say that the pandemic has revealed and reinforced these features of cultural work.

## **Stories regarding cultural workers**

Roughly speaking, the research so far has told two different stories concerning cultural workers. The first is about the quest for symbolic rewards. This story has been illustrated by the extraordinary motivation that seems to characterize artists and other cultural workers. Accordingly, they have been associated with concepts such as calling, dedication, the denial of economy, and work preference (Abbing 2002; Mangset 2004; Røyseng et al. 2007). To a large extent, these concepts build on the idea that symbolic rewards are so important to this

occupational group that they are willing to sacrifice almost everything to fulfill their professional ambitions. While such concepts stem from different theoretical universes, such as the sociology of art with Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1993, 1996) and Pierre-Michel Menger (2006) as important theorists and cultural economics with central figures such as David Throsby (1994), they all emphasize that artists and cultural workers are figures that follow their self-interest, which is either understood as a calling from within or as a battle for prestige and recognition from the field in which they work. From the Bourdieusian perspective, for example, the quest for symbolic recognition is intimately connected to the competing logics of the field of cultural production. On the one hand, we have the sub-field of restricted production with its celebration of art for art's sake; on the other, we have the sub-field of large-scale production with its emphasis on commercial values.

The second story mirrors the first one and is about the scarcity of material rewards and the precariousness that this implies for cultural workers. Several surveys have revealed that while incomes vary quite a lot both between and within the different artist groups, with some artists enjoying superstar earnings, the general pattern is one of a low average income and skewed income distribution (Bille & Jensen 2018; Heian 2018; Heian et al. 2015; Mangset et al. 2018). The artistic profession, is, in this way, characterized by insecure working conditions with high risk and low incomes. As a part of this story, it has also been suggested that the superstar earnings of a small minority of artists have provided motivation for a high degree of risk-taking in the artistic profession on the whole.

Both the symbolic and material story are important to understanding the specificities of cultural work. However, they might not paint the whole picture of what is at stake for cultural workers. Banks (2006) has argued that morality has been neglected in creative industries research. He underscores that cultural workers have mainly been portrayed as being driven by individual instrumentality. This means that the ways in which actors may possess values or follow courses of action that are not automatically geared toward enhancing status are overlooked. Accordingly, the influence of non-instrumental and ethical motives is underplayed. This also has to do with a fundamental aspect of work. On the one hand, work provides us with a platform to exercise and actualize our skills and capacities and gain recognition for it. On the other hand, work also connects people to each other and to the social fabric of society (Bolton & Laaser 2013: 508). As we see it, a story about how values, norms, and ethical motives guide cultural work might complement our understanding of what is at stake for cultural workers. This article explores how such motivations are involved by applying a moral economy perspective.

### **The moral economies perspective**

Moral economy is a perspective that views economic activities, in the broad sense, through a moral and not just a material lens. It has to do with how moral sentiments and norms govern what is seen as acceptable or unacceptable economic behavior in different spheres of activity. This means that the moral economy perspective challenges approaches where the market and society are constructed as separate spheres that operate based on different, distinctive, and uncoupled logics. The perspective also challenges the idea that people act and respond to different situations out of pure self-interest. Rather, the perspective, at least as it has been developed by the social theorist Andrew Sayer (2000, 2004, 2005), underscores that what drives people's actions and responses is an empirical question and not something that can be assumed *a priori* as, for example, in the idea of *homo economicus*.

This point of departure must be seen in relation to the seminal article of the English historian Thompson (1971), where the concept of moral economy was coined. Thompson investigated food riots in 18th-century England and found that these responses were not only a result of poverty and starvation. The riots were not only “rebellions of the belly,” as Thompson (1971: 77) put it. Although material explanations of this kind can seem comforting from a paternalistic perspective, Thompson underscored that they undermine how the situation was felt and understood from below. The food riots, according to Thompson, were also a response that had to do with broken expectations in a society that was experiencing a transformation from a system based on feudal economic organization to a capitalist economy. In this way, Thompson proposed a moral economy framework that stressed the agentic capacity of people, who are bearers of traditional norms and moral evaluations of a community, to oppose unfair and destructive economic practices. While Thompson saw the “old economy” as the moral economy, in contrast to the market economy, it is now widely acknowledged that norms and moral expectations are woven into any economic organization (Palomera & Vetta 2016). In addition, while Thompson emphasized perspectives from below, such as those of the working classes, later contributions have developed this to include, in principle, all social groups (Fassin 2009).

Sayer (2005) has argued that from a moral economy perspective there are close relations between economic distribution and recognition. Moral economies, in this way, are linked to how economic practices are, at the same time, moral practices, where the moral worth of different groups is at stake. This is of course a question that can be related to every sphere where resources are distributed, but in relation to cultural policies in pandemic times, the question of who gets what within the welfare-state context is, of course, of special interest. Even more specifically, the following question is pertinent: Who gets what within the cultural sector and how is this distribution of resources perceived?

From a moral economy perspective, the central point is that it might not simply be individual self-interest that shapes welfare-state attitudes or cultural political attitudes for that matter, but also a range of moral principles and assumptions. Such questions are also closely related to commonly held ideas about the fair distribution of burdens and benefits (Taylor-Gooby et al. 2018: 120-121). There may, for example, be different norms regarding how much inequality should be tolerated and who is entitled to be supported by others and so on.

Drawing on a moral economy perspective directs attention in a slightly different way than the main strand of welfare state research. Literature on the moral economies of the welfare state focuses on civil society, trade unions, and the public sphere, rather than on the socio-political system or specific policy instruments. The focus is on legitimacy rather than formal rights (Götz 2015: 156). As such, the moral economy perspective is well suited to analyzing political culture as dynamic fields of struggle around the boundaries of what is good and acceptable (Palomera & Vetta 2016: 415). Accordingly, when analyzing corona cultural policy in Norway, we are less interested in the specificities of the different measures than in how such arrangements were responded to by cultural workers.

## Research strategy and method

This article builds on two different empirical materials. First, the article employs qualitative interviews conducted as a part of the research project *Shifting Landscapes of Musicians' Work* (Røyseng et al. 2022). The informants included 57 professional musicians working in Norway, representing a breadth of musical genres, musical instruments, and labor market

roles, as well as variation in terms of gender, age, and geography. All of the interviews were carried out during the pandemic, more specifically between August 2020 and February 2021. This means that the interviews reflect relatively early experiences of the pandemic. In this article, we specifically draw on the parts of the interviews where the informants elaborate on how the pandemic affected their work situations, their reflections on their altered working conditions, and how they perceived their situation in light of public corona policies. As previously underscored, there are variations into what degree the pandemic has affected different art forms and cultural activities. Music is among the art forms that has been hardest hit, and the analytical value of the material should be considered in this light. On the one hand, this means that musicians represent a group of cultural workers that is positioned to articulate different aspects of the pandemic working situation. On the other hand, the variations between different groups of cultural workers require that we are cautious when generalizing our results.

Second, we have studied one of the most heightened public debates that arose as a response to one of the schemes implemented by public authorities in order to counteract the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in the cultural sector. Several schemes were implemented in the early phases of the pandemic. As the situation persisted, a new scheme, the stimulation scheme for the cultural sector, was launched in October 2020. The purpose of the scheme's grants was to achieve overarching goals in cultural policy and help the cultural sector through the Covid-19 pandemic by stimulating the organization of events that complied with the infection control orders issued by public authorities. Furthermore, the scheme was intended to encourage increased activity in the entire value chain of the cultural sector. Approximately 2 billion Norwegian kroner (NOK) were distributed by the stimulation scheme in 2020 and 2021. The responsibility for managing the scheme and processing the applications was delegated to the Arts Council. In contrast to regular Arts Council processes, applications for the stimulation scheme were not evaluated in terms of artistic quality. The main focus was on project plans, budgets, and annual accounts.

When the stimulation scheme was implemented and the first round of grants was awarded, a heightened debate arose. This was especially related to the fact that some best-selling and popular artists were announced as recipients of large sums from the scheme. The support granted to one of these best-selling popular artists, Kurt Nilsen immediately became a reference point in the debate. Thus, we have chosen to focus on this part of the debate in the analysis. The data material from this debate consists of newspaper articles collected through a systematic search of the Norwegian full-text database Atekst. The search string "kurt nilsen' AND stimuleringsordning\*" was used to identify articles published from 1 October 2020 to 24 January 2022, resulting in 171 hits. We went through the hits manually to ensure that only relevant and non-duplicate texts were included in the final sample. After this operation, we were left with 115 documents.

The interviews and media texts were systematically read and coded. This process led to the construction of a set of moral categories that was prominent in the material.

## **Musicians' moral attitudes**

The interviews were conducted during the first of three consecutive lockdowns, and the empirical material must therefore be understood in light of this. The interviews reveal that the pandemic, in its initial phase, affected the musicians quite differently. Whereas some experienced a form of relief in the form of an unexpected break from an otherwise busy touring schedule and others expressed joy related to suddenly having plenty of spare time to

practice or to make new music, several expressed early concerns about how their work situation would evolve in the future. Here, challenges related to their instable incomes and insecurity pertaining to job possibilities were highlighted by many.

Although many reported large financial losses due to having concerts and tours cancelled and having to postpone record releases and larger productions, there were remarkably few complaints among our informants. The first stage of the pandemic was rather marked by a spirit of solidarity – the pandemic had always hit *someone else* harder. One informant expressed this as follows:

At first I thought I could manage this, as there are many who are in a worse state than me for sure. So, you get a kind of social democratic attitude – I'll manage, as now the others have to receive support. When you are a musician, you are used to ups and downs. But for sure, I have missed out on quite a few tens of thousands [of kroner] over the course of this year, but I haven't counted on it (Johanne).<sup>1</sup>

The social democratic attitude, which Johanne expresses here, is articulated in other informants' statements as well. Although several of the informants felt that their industry, the music industry, was particularly hard hit by the lockdowns, all expressed gratitude for the fact that they live in a welfare society. Here, this is expressed by Olav:

I'm not complaining at all. We live in a social democracy. We have lots of support schemes that we as musicians can use. It took two days from when I applied [for me to receive the money]. I applied for NAV-help [the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration] for a few months when I had no income, and it was approved in no time (Olav).

Gratitude toward the welfare services of the social democratic society and ideas of solidarity were in this way central elements of the moral attitudes that the musicians expressed in the interviews. At the same time, thoughts and feelings regarding not being seen as valued and important for society were also evident in the material. This had less to do with access to economic support and more to do with what could be interpreted as a need for moral recognition. One of our informants, Per, talked about how he perceived this:

Now we are in a strange situation where no one really understands ... many have received a mental shock [...] Some of us thought, of course I don't know what will happen, but now I will have time to practice a lot, work a lot with things. But then all of a sudden something happens when the pace slows down, you start to look around, you start to feel a little lost [...] You start performing on the internet, streaming, and the only option is Vipps [a Norwegian mobile payment app]. Some can earn a lot, but you can also get zero. Much like the right wing, the real right, the anti-artist state support wing wants artists to sit with their hats in their hands (Per).

Like many other actors working in the performing arts, Per has been left to explore whether it is possible to earn money using digital technology (Hylland 2021). Per believes that some parts of the political spectrum want him to be in this situation and feel this kind of insecurity and the consequent inferiority. The feeling of not being valued is even more clearly stated by our informant, Elin. She talked about how she feels that the general features of instability and uncertainty in her profession took on a new dimension during the pandemic:

All musicians are used to instability and uncertainty and to being able to live with that. You can juggle it, but now it's an extra factor that just sweeps away everything. So in a way there's nothing left. What you re-

1. When we cite from the interviews, the informants have been anonymized and given fictitious names.

lied on – as a kind of security that you have something to offer that at least someone wants – now it's all gone. There is nothing left. For me, it creates uncertainty around my whole life situation as a musician and what it will look like for everyone after this. My heart bleeds a little when I see that this is what is taken first. The trading industry, the discussion we have around it ... It hurts so much to see that it is so easy to take our industry and just push it aside. I think it hurts, quite simply (Elin).

In this way, she refers to what has been repeated, at least in the Norwegian context: the cultural sector was the first to be locked down and the last to reopen. She refers to this pattern as a lack of recognition of her work in society. This is even more clearly spelled out in the next quote:

You must have a society that values what you are doing in this industry as well. (...) If you don't get any feedback from society, or that it is a matter of course that this industry should exist afterwards as well, then it will be quite harsh (Elin).

The need for feedback that Elin expresses here certainly has to do with a quest for recognition. However, it cannot be fully captured by the way such a quest has traditionally been conceptualized, either as recognition from other actors in the field of restricted production or from big audiences in the field of large-scale production, to use Bourdieu's terms. What Elin says has to do with the need for the moral recognition of cultural work from society at large. We will now move on to take a closer look at how moral motivations shaped the responses to the implementation of the stimulation scheme.

## **A sense of unfairness**

The application web page for the stimulation scheme opened on October 23, 2020, and five days later, news that several of the most popular and best-selling artists in Norway had been awarded with large sums reached the national media. One of them, the artist, Bjørn Eidsvåg, was quoted in VG:

Yesterday we applied for funding from the stimulation scheme. Today we received the approval that we will get support. Talk about fast processing. Now we are relieved and happy that this autumn's tour with a total of 40 concerts can be performed as planned (Talseth & Ighanian 2020).

Similarly, in the same article, the Norwegian artist, Kurt Nilsen, and his manager, Jan Fredrik Karlsen, stated:

We submitted the application on Friday afternoon and are happy that the Arts Council has given us an approval so quickly, as we have desperately wanted and told them that we need. A big, huge thank you to the Minister of Culture, the Ministry of Culture and the Arts Council! (Talseth & Ighanian 2020).

In this first round, 21 applications received support from the scheme. The largest amount of money – 13.3 million Norwegian Kroner – went to the application for Kurt Nilsen's Christmas tour. The response from the field came immediately. The Norwegian musician, Hasse Farnen, stated:

With this incentive scheme for the major players, the public Norwegian culture, the Ministry of Culture and unfortunately also the Arts Council have finally played themselves completely morally bankrupt and said to the small fishes in the cultural aquarium: It is our responsibility to give Kurt Nilsen a million kroner salary for Christmas! Goodbye, solidarity! (Talseth 2020).



In this way, Hasse Farmen expressed his moral concern and interpreted the first funding decisions as a sign of the stimulation scheme being dedicated to the biggest artists, representing a break with the established idea of solidarity. The sense of unfairness in prioritizing best-selling and popular artists became a recurrent issue in the debate. The announcement of the grants given to these specific artists was interpreted in light of a request from public authorities during the first part of the pandemic: that all of us should participate in a voluntary event [dugnad] in order to get through the difficulties caused by Covid-19. The band Great News stated:

The problem is that a scheme has been set up to stimulate cultural life in an ongoing pandemic, but the support still goes to the biggest artists. On the one hand, artists and other actors working in the cultural sector are asked to “contribute to the voluntary event” [dugnaden] – at the same time, some of the largest artists are awarded millions in support (Johnsen 2020).

It was seen as unfair that some of the artists who are perceived as well-off should be given priority over smaller and more vulnerable actors in the field. This viewpoint was also associated with experiences of the general rights of freelance workers in the welfare state. Under the title “Should freelancers get children?” the freelance comedian and actor, Aila Eckhoff Sinober, wrote how after she got pregnant she realized that she had very weak rights in terms of applying for parental benefits. In her text, she lampooned the irony of the situation she found herself in and the priorities of the welfare state:

My God, what was I thinking. It should not have been me who was pregnant. It should have been Kurt Nilsen (Sinober 2020).

In this way, she used the decision to allocate 13 million kroner to Kurt Nilsen’s Christmas tour to shed light on her experience regarding the weak rights of freelance artists in the very same welfare state.

In brief, the stimulation grant awarded to Kurt Nilsen was perceived as representing another principle than that expected from the public authorities. This was clearly spelled out by the political editor in the newspaper *Nationen*:

[...] around the country there are a few lesser-known musicians who are forced to sell away guitars and microphones to afford to pay their rent when a large amount of playing jobs are canceled. [...] Until Raja [Norwegian Minister of Culture, 2020-2021] proves otherwise, or communicates better, he, the ministry and the Arts Council must therefore deal with being criticized. Instead of a distribution based on a solidarity principle, they obviously practice the ABBA principle of the winner takes it all (Ekornholmen 2020).

The expectation that the welfare state should primarily take care of the weakest and most vulnerable was under question. Quite a few media depictions focused on how the priorities of the stimulation scheme primarily benefitted the big and rich actors in the cultural sector. On December 9, the leftwing newspaper *Klassekampen* published an article where it compared the funding decisions of the corona schemes of the Arts Council with the latest tax lists:

A review of the tax lists that were published yesterday, also shows that the individual artists who have received the most corona support this autumn, are also among the most highly paid in the country (Vollan et al. 2020).

In this way, it was hinted that the corona cultural policies were producing a Matthew effect, based on which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

The intensity of the debate also seems to be related to a silent consensus around a moral code within the music profession. This moral code exhorts musicians to be modest in terms of their relationship with money. A rock musician expressed it in this way:

We have applied for support and are waiting for an answer. We're used to pawning bottles. We are not Kurt Nilsen, to put it that way! We do not need 13 million! We have managed before and we manage now (Pedersen 2021).

In this way, the representative of the rock band underscored that it was possible for them to make music and play concerts with modest budgets. The jazz musician, Bendik Hofseth, explained the moral code even more clearly in a chronicle:

I become moral on behalf of the profession when someone breaks the gentleman's code of moderation, solidarity and community, and reaps where others have sown. (...) A part of our professional code in relation to money is precisely moderation (Hofseth, 2020).

Hofseth continued with an argument related to ideas about the fair distribution of common resources. "It is our common oil wealth that is distributed in this way," he wrote (Hofseth 2020).

The unfairness that was felt in relation to the grants given to the well-known artists also seems to have something to do with time. First, the speed of the first stage of processing of the applications represented in itself a break with the expectations one holds regarding a bureaucracy, which is often understood as being synonymous with slow decision-making processes. The approval of applications only one day after their submission represents an exception, at least when it comes to funding from the Arts Council. Second, the chronological order to be followed in terms of the processing of applications was also questioned. As a response to being asked whether she felt that it was unfair that she had not yet received an answer regarding her application for support for a Christmas tour, a producer answered:

Absolutely! I will not say that this is the case, because I have no proof of that, but as an outsider, it seems as if the big producers or players have received their [support] first. Of course, everyone should get, but it is the order I react to, she says (Østbø 2020a).

In short, the stimulation scheme generated reactions associated with broken expectations and a strong sense of unfairness.

## **A trickle-down morality**

While the criticism of the stimulation scheme and the decisions to award best-selling artists with grants was strong, the policy was also defended by quite a few actors, including leading government players. The justification of the scheme revolved around the idea that the grants would not only help the well-known artists to continue with their work, but also provide actors in the entire value chain of the cultural sector with paid employment. The Minister of Culture, Abid Raja (2020–2021), repeatedly underscored this in his replies to the many journalists:

When Kurt Nilsen goes to the culture house in Tønsberg, everyone who is involved in the concert gets paid, thanks to Kurt Nilsen. When he goes to the Grieghallen in Bergen, the Grieg Hall gets paid, thanks

to Kurt Nilsen. The 13 million do not end up in the pocket of one person, Kurt Nilsen, they are spread out. He will have 26 concerts from Tønsberg to Bodø. He will have money to pay for the concert venues, for the tour costs; flights, hotels and so on. He has to pay all the musicians, sound and light and crew and guards. And as far as I know, 13 million is less than half of what they generated themselves from income last year (Østbø 2020b).

Also the Prime Minister, Erna Solberg (2013–2021), was asked about her views on the grants given to Kurt Nilsen, and she responded along similar lines:

I hear that some people think, also from the rostrum of the Parliament, that it is horrible that Kurt Nilsen gets 13 point something million. He does not get that. It is his tour of concerts before Christmas that get this money. It's because of all the people participating with light, sound and everything else. They are among those in the cultural sector who have now been hit quite hard [by the pandemic] (Pedersen 2020).

In this way, both the Minister of Culture and the Prime Minister argued that the money awarded to Kurt Nilsen and other applicants of the stimulation scheme would trickle down to other cultural workers. However, the scheme was not only defended by the politicians representing the government. Some of the actors from the cultural sector who received funding from the scheme expressed the same idea. Kurt Nilsen responded that his decision to conduct the Christmas tour was motivated by him realizing that several of the workers in his crew were struggling to earn enough money to pay their bills:

That much of the criticism was directed toward me, must be because people have misunderstood how the system works. The money is supposed to lubricate the large apparatus, keep the wheels running. Many are guaranteed salaries. [...] I feel responsible for the people I work with (Johnsen 2020).

In addition to the idea that grants from the stimulation scheme given to big, best-selling artists would generate work and income in the entire value chain, it was also underscored that the focus was on actors that primarily work in a commercial mode. Accordingly, they had never before burdened public support schemes, and the grants from the stimulation scheme represented an exception. A representative of the popular rock band D.D.E., which also received a considerable grant from the scheme, explained how the grants were also important for commercial bands:

After a year without income, we now started to approach the “bottom of the casket”, so this grant came in very handy [...]. It is not as a band we get the money, but as the organizer who must pay everyone who contributes. D.D.E. never get any support otherwise, and in normal times that's all right. But we run a business, and when we are excluded from a market, it is the market economy that lays the foundation for such an application (Moen 2020).

Also, the Minister of Culture emphasized that the best-selling artists who had been awarded grants through the stimulation scheme did not normally place a burden on the public budget. In this way, it was indicated that it is only fair and just that actors that normally generate work and income in the cultural sector on a commercial basis are also taken care of by the welfare state in the unusual situation of the pandemic. As this serves to show, the trickle-down morality articulated by the government actors was premised on a broader morality. Whereas the criticism that was levelled against the stimulation scheme by cultural workers was premised on a morality of solidarity and redistribution to accommodate the needs of the most disadvantaged actors, the government actors relied rather on a morality of meritocratic market justice. In accordance with this model, cultural workers have decided to

pursue careers in a highly competitive, “winner-takes-all” market environment, where it is seen as legitimate and fair that only a few actors are richly rewarded, and the majority is not, as long as there is a level playing field or equal opportunity for competition. In this sense, the decisions to award generous support for the superstar actors through the stimulation scheme can be seen as a strategy to uphold the normal order of the music industry in exceptional times. The Minister of Culture made it clear that he was ready to defend artists who were portrayed in a bad light due to having received support from the stimulation scheme:

I do not let a single cultural worker stand in the pillory without being taken in defense. I take Kurt Nilsen, Bjørn Eidsvåg and Truls Svendsen in defense and say thank you very much for using the Christmas season to carry out the events that can be carried out. And Kurt Nilsen has never before applied for a single public kroner to do this (Østbø 2020b).

The Minister of Culture also expressed how he interpreted the comments criticizing the stimulation scheme as coming from those who had experienced disappointment with regards to the results of their own applications:

I understand that those who for various reasons have had their applications rejected can get angry, but they can apply and if they are rejected, they can complain and get their application processed again (Østbø 2021).

Here, the Minister of Culture indicates that the strong reactions in the debate about the stimulation scheme had to do with disappointment related to the destiny of the applications of the critics.

## Concluding discussion

The aim of this article was to investigate the responses of cultural workers to the pandemic working situation and to the corona policies targeting the cultural sector. Applying the moral economies perspective to the situation of cultural workers during the Covid-19 pandemic has enabled an analysis where the moral outlooks of cultural workers have come to light. We have seen that the moral opinions and expectations of many musicians and other cultural workers are related to ideas of solidarity, support for the redistributive arrangements of the welfare state, and ideas of maintaining equality in the cultural sector. This was evident in the interviews with the musicians conducted quite early in the pandemic. However, when the stimulation scheme was implemented, it was perceived as a fundamental break with this moral framework. From the vantage point of the politicians responsible for the corona-specific cultural policies and some of the musicians and cultural workers who were awarded grants by them, on the other hand, the moral perspective was anchored in ideas of generating work and income in entire value chains. Additionally, it was seen as fair and just that actors normally operating on a commercial basis should be taken care of by the welfare state in the exceptional times of the pandemic. This article has, in this way, contributed with insights into the conflicting moral outlooks that collided during the implementation of corona cultural policies.

There are interesting parallels between Thompson’s analysis of the moral economy of the English crowd and what we have seen in the debate about the stimulation scheme for the cultural sector in Norway. First, the responses from a wide range of actors in the cultural sector in the public debate about the schemes are not fully understood as “rebellions of the belly” or as disappointment and dissatisfaction resulting from having their applications

rejected. Such explanations neglect that the debate was about broken expectations, moral concerns, and ideas concerning the redistributive role of the welfare state. Second, the stimulation scheme was set up within a moral framework we have labeled as a trickle-down morality. To some extent, it makes sense to interpret the implementation of the stimulation scheme as somewhat market-oriented. Accordingly, it broke with the moral outlook of many cultural workers for whom the Norwegian welfare state is seen as a guarantor of egalitarian values. As we have seen, in some parts of the debate, it was hinted that the way the scheme was designed and implemented would increase inequality in the cultural sector. This is also a parallel to Thompson's analysis in the sense that a well-established moral economy is challenged by a more market-oriented economy.

The intensity of the debate about the stimulation scheme can be interpreted as an indication of the need for seeing cultural workers' quest for recognition as being about something more than the quest for recognition from significant actors in the cultural sector itself. The debate about the corona schemes revealed that what is seen as the just and fair distribution of public resources also involves the question of who is recognized by the welfare state. We believe that this calls for the telling of a third story about cultural workers. In addition to the story about the quest for symbolic rewards and the story about the scarcity of material rewards, we argue that we need to develop a story about the quest for moral recognition from society, represented by the public authorities. In this picture, the welfare state represented by the Minister of Culture, the Ministry of Culture, and the Arts Council does not only distribute material resources and symbolic prestige, but also contributes to the sense of moral worth among the actors of the cultural field. However, there is an overlap between the moral outlooks we have identified in this article and Bourdieu's division of the field of cultural production into the sub-fields of restricted production and large-scale production. To some extent, the two different moral outlooks we have identified in this article correspond to Bourdieu's different sub-fields. The moral ideal of moderation in relation to money can be seen as closely related to the idea of sacrifice that is emphasized as typical of the actors of the sub-field of restricted production. Similarly, the moral value of generating activity in the market aligns with the idea of commercial values in the sub-field of large-scale production.

The stimulation scheme is only one of several policy measures that have been made available to cultural workers during the pandemic. Therefore, our analysis has less to say about how corona cultural policy relates to central features of the development of the welfare state and the related questions of market-orientation and instrumentalization. In line with the moral economy perspective, the focus has been more on what is seen as legitimate and morally acceptable. Applying the moral economies perspective opens a slightly different way of investigating the welfare aspect of the Nordic cultural model than that previously scrutinized. The strength of this perspective is that it connects the policies of public authorities with the perceptions of and responses to them. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the need for a way to study the relationship between cultural workers and the welfare state that does not encapsulate the cultural sector in a micro-cosmos, which several well-known and widely used theories from the sociology of art have been criticized for doing (van Maanen 2009). We need theories and perspectives that see cultural workers, the cultural sector, and cultural policy as being in a dynamic relationship with society at large.

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